

WHAT THE FELLOWS SAY WHAT THE FIRMS SAY

C. Lash Harrison (*Ford & Harrison*) volunteered for Atlanta Legal Aid in 1964. Remembering his experience there as "good legal training and good life training," he sent associate Kevin Mencke to serve as a Fellow in 1998 and later created the F. Carter Tate Fellowship to support the Fellowship Program in his firm.

Kevin recalls:

The clients that I served during my work in the Cobb office stay in my memory:

The 18-year-old disabled woman facing eviction;

Tenants, asked to leave an apartment for five days of renovations that stretched into months, who discovered severe damage to their possessions;

An abused woman, beaten and terrorized in front of her children who could see no way out.

For these people—and many like them—my counsel made a material difference. The power of the law to help them and the weight of my responsibility to represent them well were a sobering reinforcement of truths I already knew. I am back in my law firm now, but the experience of Atlanta Legal Aid remains with me. I am a better lawyer and a better human being than I was.

The Fellowship Program is one of those rare opportunities in which virtually everyone wins. First and foremost, Atlanta Legal Aid gets added lawyer capacity for an extended period of time to serve more clients. Next, the tangible good will and support from the private bar buoy the spirits of its lawyers and staff. Finally, the Fellows themselves—whether adversarial or transactional lawyers—obtain eye-opening, career-enriching experiences of inestimable value, and these experiences increase their value to their firm.

W. Terence Walsh
Alston & Bird

The Fellowship Program is extremely beneficial to Powell, Goldstein because it allows young lawyers to appear in court and to develop litigation skills. Moreover, the program allows our firm to meet its commitment to provide legal services to those who otherwise could not afford these services.

John T. Marshall
Powell Goldstein, LLP

Participating Firms

Alston & Bird

Arnall Golden Gregory

Dow Lohnes PLLC

Ford & Harrison

Holland & Knight

Hunton & Williams

Kilpatrick Stockton

Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough

Paul, Hastings, Janofsky & Walker LLP

Powell Goldstein, LLP

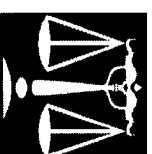
Smith, Gambrell & Russell, LLP

Sutherland Asbill & Brennan

Troutman Sanders

The Fellowship Program

*A pro bono partnership
between law firms and
Atlanta Legal Aid Society*



Atlanta
Legal Aid
Society

WHAT IT IS...

The Fellowship Program began in 1995 when Alston & Bird committed an associate to work at Atlanta Legal Aid for four months. Since then, ten Atlanta law firms have sent associates to Atlanta Legal Aid for periods of four to six months. Under the program, firms sponsor associates to work at one of Atlanta Legal Aid's five offices. These associates continue to receive salary and benefits from their firm and maintain office and library privileges there.

An outstanding collaboration between the private bar and public-interest practice, the program immerses the Fellows in a variety of cases and crises, giving them valuable opportunities for court time and responsibilities that only come much later at a large firm. Sponsoring law firms have learned that the Fellowship Program is one form of pro bono service that rewards them, as well as the recipient, in several ways:

- ***Fellows learn how to prepare a case for trial or mediation and how to negotiate a settlement. They learn about the practicalities of trying cases—how to respond when their client's testimony contains surprises, how to answer tough questions by a judge, and how to persuade a judge that their client should prevail.***
- ***Fellows learn how to deal with clients. They learn not only how to assess a case, but also how to convey that assessment to the client. They learn to prepare their client for what will happen during the course of a case. They learn to listen closely for other legal needs that their client may have.***
- ***Fellows gain self-confidence to convince a judge, the opposing party, and their client that they can provide high quality representation, even if they are relatively inexperienced.***

Fellows expand Atlanta Legal Aid's capacity to serve more clients and to handle client emergencies. Each Fellow is assigned to an Atlanta Legal Aid unit under the supervision of an experienced attorney, who develops an individualized work plan for the Fellow. After training in specific areas of poverty law practice, the Fellow screens clients, handle cases—including emergencies—and take these cases to court, if necessary. Fellows have usually handled domestic relations cases and evictions, but they have also represent children on special education cases, wrote wills for persons with HIV/AIDS and counseled senior citizens on probate matters.

The Fellowship Program benefits all involved. The associate gets a new kind of experience to take back to the firm and incorporate into future practice. The firm gets a lawyer with new skills, training and a solid commitment to pro bono work and client service. Atlanta Legal Aid gets to help clients that otherwise would be turned away. And, both the firm and Atlanta Legal Aid benefit immensely from the strengthening of ties between their two organizations.

Mentoring our fellows is very rewarding. In the general law unit, we try to provide fellows with a variety of case types and advocacy settings—courtroom time, mediation and informal negotiation in landlord tenant disputes, representing clients in unemployment and public benefit matters in administrative hearings, and advocacy for children with special needs. Our fellows have brought incredible excitement, enthusiasm and hard work to the job of helping our low income clients and exploring these new areas of law. Working with them continually energizes me and is an invaluable and enriching experience for their Atlanta Legal Aid colleagues.

Margaret Hayman, Attorney, Atlanta Legal Aid Society, Inc.